

CHAPTER II: THE PRESIDIO, GROWING PAINS

A. The Presidio and the Army, 1849-1860

The sleepy village of San Francisco had a population of about 500 when gold was discovered in the Sierra foothills in 1848. Word flew swiftly and by the beginning of 1849 would-be gold miners and fortune hunters from the East Coast, from Europe, from all over the world, flocked to California. A mixture of languages and cultures descended upon San Francisco and by the end of that year the hastily-built city had a population of 20,000. Gambling, drinking, and prostitution flourished as winter drove miners down from the hills. Inflation in real estate, food, and lodging made life difficult, even dangerous, as crime flourished. Major fires swept through the community from time to time. The Presidio's officers and men witnessed and became involved with the tumultuous times.

Neither the few dragoons nor the artillerymen were able to curb the lawlessness that swept over San Francisco during the first six months of 1849. Discharged volunteers and others formed gangs, calling themselves the "Hounds" and the "Regulators," and preyed on businesses and newcomers alike. Despite military government, the Army in California remained too weak to impose order. Not until the more responsible citizens organized into committees to curb the more violent instigators did a semblance of order return to the city.

At any rate, military government ended in December 1849 and California's new governor, Peter H. Barnett, assumed his office. The Presidio of San Francisco no longer concerned itself with civil matters and would not until the Civil War.

By the end of 1849 three military installations had been established in northern California: the Presidio of Monterey, the Presidio of San Francisco, and Benicia Barracks. Captain Keyes at the Presidio reported to the commanding officer of the Tenth Military Department (California) at Monterey. That officer in turn reported to the general commanding the Pacific Division (California and Oregon Territory) also headquartered at Monterey for the time being. The Army, like most government agencies, underwent continuous reorganizations in succeeding years. Headquarters moved from Monterey to San Francisco (briefly), to Sonoma, to Benicia, to San Francisco (again, briefly), back to Benicia, and finally settled at San Francisco in 1857. Not for twenty more years or so would headquarters be established at the Presidio

itself where it would remain for a decade.¹

During the times the Army located the headquarters at San Francisco, it rented office space, stables, and other structures as needed. Likewise, the headquarters staff rented living arrangements in the city. The Presidio did not have quarters for these personnel until the late 1870s. The records are incomplete as to the location of the headquarters in the early years. William T. Sherman wrote that the office in 1849 was in the custom house and a residence formerly owned by the Hudson's Bay Company served as quarters.²

When Bvt. Brig. Gen. Ethan Allen Hitchcock moved his headquarters from Benicia to San Francisco in 1852, he wrote, "In transferring head-quarters hither I have not consulted personal comfort or economy; but I have moved because it is the center of the country." The city directory for 1853 placed the "U.S. Army Office" in Folsom's iron building on the corner of California and Leidsdorff streets. A year later the Army's inspector general found the offices in a building on Montgomery Street. An 1856 San Francisco directory located the Quartermaster Department's office in a building on the southeast corner of California and Montgomery streets. When the headquarters returned to San Francisco permanently in 1857 it first opened at 44 Bush Street. For most of the Civil War period, however, it rented offices at 742 Washington Street.³

1. [U.S. Army], *Outline Descriptions, Military Posts in the Military Division of the Pacific* (1879); Francis Paul Prucha, *A Guide to the Military Posts of the United States, 1789-1895* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964), pp. 145-51; Grivas, *Military Governments*, pp. 135-137 and 148. The above outline is "bare bones." Each reorganization involved changing geographical boundaries, mergers, inclusions, exclusions, and responsibilities.

2. Sherman did not live at the Presidio, but his horse did: "You will please cause a government horse, now in charge of 1st Lieutenant W.T. Sherman, 3d Artillery, acting assistant adjutant general, to be foraged and kept for Lieutenant Sherman's service at the Presidio of San Francisco." Brig. Gen. Persifor Smith, March 7, 1849, to Capt. J.L. Folsom, in House Executive Document 17, p. 715.

3. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman* (New York 1891), p. 32; Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field, Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, USA*, ed. W.A. Crofutt (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 395; *San Francisco Directory*, 1853 and 1863; Robert W. Frazer, ed., *Mansfield on the Condition of the Western Forts, 1853-54* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 125-127; *Colville's San Francisco Directory*, 1856-57. Sherman held a low opinion of the town, "a more desolate region it was impossible to conceive of." His superior, Brig. Gen. Persifor Smith, thought it worse, "The town of San Francisco is in no way fitted for military or commercial purposes; there is no harbor, a bad landing place, bad water, no supplies of provisions, an inclement climate, and it is cut off from the rest of the country." Smith, April 5, 1849, to the Adjutant General, Washington, in House Executive Document 17, p. 717.

B. Captain Keyes

Capt. Erasmus Darwin Keyes commanded the Presidio for almost ten years, 1849-1858. During that period he was often absent from the post for a month on court martial duty, on extended leave, or absent for a year fighting Indians. Leaving his instructor position at the United States Military Academy, he sailed for California, "We entered the Golden Gate on the morning of April 1, 1849." He continued, "The first persons I met were Lieutenant W.T. Sherman and Captain Joseph L. Folsom, who was quartermaster. Sherman saluted me as warmly as a brother, Folsom was less cordial, but he loaned me a wheelbarrow, by means of which I transported my trunks to the old Russian storehouse, where I slept the first two nights on the floor, with a bit of wood for a pillow."⁴

Early in his new assignment Keyes faced two difficult problems – desertion and squatters. When Company M arrived at the post in May it counted fifty-seven men in the ranks. In June the post return recorded that five apprehended deserters had run off again. In July twelve more men headed for the hills without leave. By the end of August the Presidio's enlisted strength had dwindled to fifteen. On one occasion Keyes sent an officer and a detail in pursuit of absentees. When they reached the party, the detail took off with the deserters leaving the officer empty-handed.⁵

Every private knew he could make more money in one day at the mines than he could make in months in the Army. Colonel Mason wrote in 1848, "A soldier of the artillery company returned here a few days ago from the mines, having been absent on furlough twenty days; he made by trading and working during that time \$1,500 . . . a sum of money greater than he receives in pay, clothes, and rations during a whole

4. Keyes graduated from West Point in 1836 and became an artillery officer. Recognized early as possessing leadership qualities, he had reached the rank of colonel on the eve of the Civil War. Before he came to the Presidio he had served as an aide-de-camp to Gen. Winfield Scott among other assignments. Early in the Civil War he did duty as General Scott's military secretary, then as a major general of volunteers. Keyes resigned from the Army in 1864 following criticism for lacking initiative while the Battle of Gettysburg raged. He settled in San Francisco and engaged in mining and viticulture. Keyes died in 1895 while traveling in France. Heitman, *Historical Register*; Robert McHenry, ed. *Webster's American Military Biographies* (Springfield, Mass.: G & C Merriam, 1878), p. 216; Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Civil War* (New York: Facts on File, 1988), pp. 361-362; E.D. Keyes, *Fifty Years' Observation of Men and Events, Civil and Military* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 228.

5. Post Returns, May-August 1849; Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 194.

enlistment of five years." Officers too felt the effects of the raging inflation in California. To ease the hardship somewhat, Congress authorized an increase in pay for military on the Pacific Coast – \$2 a day for officers and double pay for enlisted men, the government retaining one half until honorable discharge. But desertion remained a headache long after the gold fields had lost their luster.⁶

Squatters (settlers without legal claim) on the military reservations in the Bay Area increased as the population expanded during the days of the land rush. Nowhere was the problem more serious than on the San Francisco peninsula. General Kearny in 1847 issued a proclamation that ceded to San Francisco "the whole of the Beach and water lots on the Eastern front of the Town, except such portions as might be selected by the senior officers of the Army and Navy, these for public purposes." Senior officers remained idle for the time being. Later that year Governor Mason directed Major Hardie at the Presidio to select such lands. Hardie, in conference with the Navy, reserved Rincon Point and certain lots within the town.

When Keyes took over in 1849 he learned that a number of persons had been allowed to occupy portions of the lots. The situation had become so messy that he recommended that the land be formally leased to responsible persons for a term of years. This was done, but eventually these town lots became part and parcel of San Francisco.

Not so Rincon Point; it was covered with squatters. Keyes decided on firm action. He donned his full-dress uniform and marched Company M to the reserve. There he ordered the illegal occupants to remove themselves and chattels immediately. All did so, except "The Sydney Duck." Keyes ordered his men to pick up the man's tents (they contained a hardware store) and take them outside the reserve. Later, the Duck sued the captain, but the case was thrown out of court.⁷

As for the Presidio, the first action concerning it occurred in 1848 when Mason ordered Quartermaster

6. Mason, August 17, 1848, in House Executive Document 17, p. 534; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 100 and 100n; Leonard L. Lerwill, *The Personnel Replacement System in the United States Army* (Washington, 1954), p. 63. Veterans of the Mexican War received as additional \$2 per month. In 1854 a private's pay increased from \$7 to \$11 per month.

7. Capt. E.D. Keyes, July 10, 1852, to Maj. O Cross, Quartermaster, Land Records, OCE, RG 77, NA; Keyes, *Fifty Years*, p. 292; House Executive Document 17, p. 927. The Sydney Ducks were an infamous Australian criminal gang of the Gold Rush era. Richards, *Historic San Francisco*, p. 78.

Folsom to set aside a reserve that would embrace the Presidio and Point San Jose. Folsom asked Lt. William H. Warner, Topographical Engineers, to carry out the survey. Folsom, not being a modest man, presented a sketch of a reserve containing 10,000 acres that included the northwest portion of the peninsula. The boundary line ran south from Point San Jose to about Twin Peaks, then southwest toward Lake Merced and the ocean.

The next year, a presidential commission composed of army and navy officers (Joint Commission for Defense of Pacific Coast) arrived on the West Coast for the purpose of establishing government reserves. Recommending fortifications on both sides of the Golden Gate and on Alcatraz Island, the commission concluded that San Francisco Bay was the most important naval and military position on the Pacific Coast. As a result of its work, President Millard Fillmore signed an executive order on November 6, 1850:

In the Bay of San Francisco, California: 1st From a point 800 yards south of Point San Jose to the southern boundary of the Presidio, along the southern boundary to its western extremity and thence in a straight line to the Pacific ocean, passing by the southern extremity of a pond [Mountain Lake] that has its outlet into the channel between Fort Point and Point Lobos.

A year later, on December 31, 1851, President Fillmore, to settle a land claim, signed a second executive order modifying the boundaries and having the effect of separating Point San Jose from the Presidio:

1st The promontory of Point [San] Jose within boundaries not less than eight hundred yards from its northern extremity [i.e., the boundary for Point San Jose was an arc of 800 yards radius from the northern extremity from shore to shore].

2d The Presidio tract and Fort Point embracing all land north of a line running in a westerly direction from the south eastern corner of the Presidio tract to the southern extremity of a pond lying between Fort Point and Point Lobos, and passing through the middle of said pond and its outlet to the channel of entrance from the ocean [Lobos Creek].⁸

To mark the southeastern corner of the reservation, Captain Keyes planted upright an old cannon at the spot, "at a point on the Hill, within a few feet of what is now [1871] the N.E. corner of the fence

8. President Millard Fillmore, Executive Order, November 6, 1850, and amendment, December 31, 1851; and Capt. J.L. Folsom, June 23, 1848, to Gen. Bennett Riley, PSF, Land Papers, OCE, RG 77, NA; Erwin N. Thompson, *Seacoast Fortifications, San Francisco Harbor, Golden Gate National Recreation Area* (Denver: National Park Service, 1979), pp. 20-22.

surrounding the Lone Mountain Cemetery." He also laid off two boundary lines, to the ocean and to the bay. As he remembered, the line running northward from the cannon ran parallel to Larkin (Lyon?) Street. Keyes constructed a wooden fence along that line.⁹

In January 1850 Keyes wrote headquarters that unless some decided steps were taken immediately, all the public reserves at San Francisco would be appropriated by citizens having claims. When Warner marked out the reservation, its dimensions were of no consequence as the country was a desert. Now, however, all was changed; citizens were everywhere. He discovered a survey party at work on Presidio land. He immediately pulled up the marking flags and ordered the surveyors to cease work. To back up his orders, he sent a soldier detail to obliterate all traces of the survey. He reported, too, removing twenty squatter tents from the reservation.

One of Keyes' officers, Lt. Horatio Gates Gibson, recalled those early years, "During that time no alteration of the boundaries of the Reserve . . . was made Every effort was made by the military authorities to keep off trespassers, but they were persistent and numerous, and the efforts failed utterly so far as Point San Jose was concerned." Gibson returned to the Presidio in 1859 as post commander. Keyes' cannon was still in place. Gibson had a "crude" survey made and he enclosed the reservation with substantial fences. The reservation boundaries would require adjustments in future years. Now, however, the Presidio had acquired its permanent size and shape.¹⁰

One citizen received permission to build on the Presidio. Captain Keyes and his tiny command marched from the post in the spring of 1851 in response to miner-Indian conflicts. During his absence, Quartermaster Folsom gave permission to George F. Sweeney to erect a house on Redoubt (Rob) Hill for a telegraphic station to house a lookout reporting incoming ships. Some time in the 1850s this lookout

9. E.D. Keyes, Statement, no date, recorded in Chief of Engineers Office, 1871, Land Papers; Keyes, November 1, 1849, and January 19 and July 31, 1850, to E.R.S. Canby, Bulky File, all in OCE, RG 77, NA. Keyes made the above statement circa 1871 when a resident of San Francisco. It turned out his line was not parallel to Lyon Street although it began there; it ended up on the edge of the bay near the foot of Broderick Street. This boundary was later adjusted. The cannon was near the present intersection of Lyon Street and Pacific Avenue.

10. Maj. H.G. Gibson, Fort Wadsworth, N.Y., March 29, 1880, to Chief of Engineers, PSF, Land Papers, OCE, RG 77, NA; Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 136, writes: "American settlers refused to become contented peasants. Throughout the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, squatter violence was commonplace."

facility moved from the Presidio to Point Lobos, but the house remained. Capt. Jeremy F. Gilmer, Corps of Engineers, became supervisor of construction of a masonry fort at Fort Point in 1859. In a letter to the Chief of Engineers regarding a proposal for a tavern at Fort Point, he included a recommendation that the telegraphic station be removed inasmuch as no one occupied it. Then, or sometime later, the house disappeared.¹¹

C. "miserable adoby buildings"

When East Coast Americans, especially those arriving by sea, first saw the Presidio's adobe buildings and the surrounding sand hills, their reaction was one of dislike for the dirty looking structures. A staff officer who visited the Presidio in 1852 described his ride out from San Francisco, "There are some small farms, or rather kitchen gardens, on the road to the Presidio, and the view of the Bay is fine from the high hills," but he was not impressed, "everything looks dirty and sandy; you cannot [avoid] the impression that it is a mean country."¹² A post quartermaster reported, "I consider all these buildings . . . of no value and the Post would be improved by their removal. They consist of old Adoba walls dilapidated and mouldering down from age with ponderous leaky roofs. In fact they are nothing now but unsightly mud enclosures."¹³

A pioneer California historian wrote an early description of the Presidio:

The old adobe buildings, and a portion of the walls, are there. . . . The castle of the Mexican commandant and the fort are now occupied by American troops; are neat, whitewashed, picket fences supply the place of a large part of the old walls. The presidio is quadrangular, each side being in length about one hundred yards. . . . The buildings within the enclosure are situated on three sides, extending the whole length of one side [west] and about half the length of the other two [north and south], are of equal height with the walls, and are covered with earthen tile.¹⁴

11. Agreement between Folsom and George F. Sweeney, June 4, 1851; and Gilmer, June 18, 1859, to Engineer Department, Washington, Bulky File, OCE, RG 77, NA. At that time the Engineers planned to construct redoubts on the hill as a defense for the new fort from land attack. Actually, the hill became the site of a rock quarry. The Army's present name of Rob Hill came from its having been the site of a Coast and Geodetic Survey station by that name.

12. Edwards, *California Diary of Townsend*, p. 64.

13. R.W. Allen, March 15, 1855, to Maj. O. Cross, Consolidated Correspondence File (hereinafter cited as CCF), OQMG, RG 92, NA.

14. E.S. Capron, an extract from his *History of California, from its discovery to the present time* (Boston 1854), in National Park Service, *The Presidio of San*

The Army's first formal inspection of the Presidio occurred in May 1852 when Captain Keyes was on leave. Capt. Charles S. Merchant, 3d Artillery, the acting post commander, accompanied the inspector general on his rounds. At that time an adobe building on the north side of the compound, number 4, served as a magazine for gun powder. The inspector thought that at a small expense it could be fitted up as a much needed hospital. And so it became. Concerning the buildings in general, the inspector said they had been "erected by the Mexican government – are of

adobe or sun dried brick. They afford three Barrack-rooms, together with a mess-room & kitchen sufficiently commodious for one Company of Artillery – not more.

Of these old buildings there is one now that was designed for officers' quarters – these rooms are on the ground floor; & with some repairs that have been made by the troops have been rendered tolerably comfortable – that is to say habitable; but they do not afford the complements of quarters, offices, etc. for the number of officers belonging to the Garrison.

The inspector estimated that the quartermaster had spent \$6,000 in making the adobe quarters, barracks, guardroom, and prison habitable.¹⁵

A sketch of the Presidio, prepared in 1852, confirmed the inspector's findings. A flagstaff flying the Stars and Stripes overlooked the whitewashed buildings and troops drilling. While the inspector recorded the artillery as consisting of two 6-pounder field guns and two 12-pounder howitzers, the sketch showed six cannon. Cattle roamed the land outside the fence – a familiar scene at the Presidio for many years to come.¹⁶

In January 1854 a windstorm blew the "zinc" roof off the enlisted barracks and broke some window glass. Captain Keyes surveyed the damage and concluded that shingles would make a better roof. But the new Department of the Pacific commander, Brig. Gen. John E. Wool, had a better idea. He ordered the immediate construction of a wood-frame barracks of two stories, 116 feet in length, large enough to hold

(..continued)

Francisco, p. 74.

15. Inspector General George A. McCall, May 25, 1852, report of inspection, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780-1917, RG 94, NA.

16. Sketch of the Presidio of San Francisco, 111-SC-91387, Still Picture Branch, NA.

two companies of eighty men each.¹⁷

The barracks was completed when Inspector General Joseph F.K. Mansfield visited the post in 1854:

The quarters for the soldiers were miserable adobe buildings, the leavings of the Mexican Government, but were kept in good police and order. And the quarters for the officers, not much better. A temporary barrack for the soldiers has been subsequently erected by order of General Wool.

The store house for arms and clothing badly ventilated and not suitable.

The hospital building a poor structure, and it should be levelled as it occupies the ground suitable for drills, parades, etc.

All the buildings for stores etc etc worthless.

A garden existed here, but it was in very bad order and not, in my opinion, sufficiently large, yet there is land enough.¹⁸

The post quartermaster, Capt. Robert Allen, compiled a building report for the Presidio in March 1855. He provided numbers for the five principal structures, the first of several numbering systems at the Presidio:

No. 1, he said, served as officers' quarters. An adobe building, one story high, having a porch in front. It contained six rooms, each measuring 18 feet by 22 feet. At that time one room served as a kitchen, one as a mess room, and two two-room sets were quarters for Captain Keyes and Lt. Michael R. Morgan, a Canadian-born graduate of West Point.¹⁹

No. 2. Barracks for soldiers. New, wood-frame building, two-story, lower rooms 25 feet by 35 feet, upper rooms 25 feet by 40 feet. Also two rooms to the rear used as mess rooms, each 12 feet by 40 feet, one story high.

17. Capt. E.D. Keyes, January 1, 1854, to Maj. R. Allen; and E.D. Townsend, May 8, 1854, Special Orders 42, both in CCF, OQMG, RG 92, NA.

18. Frazer, ed., *Mansfield*, pp. 135-136.

19. This structure remains at the Presidio. Incorporated in the front portion of the Presidio Officers' Club, 50, it has a long illustrious history. At the time of the report the Presidio had two additional officers, Surg. C.H. Lamb and Captain Allen, who lived in the city.

No. 3. Old adobe barracks, dimensions 20 feet by 105 feet. Divided into six rooms, the first 20 feet by 20 feet used as a guardroom; the second same size, partitioned and used as a prison and clothing room; the third the same size and occupied by laundresses; the fourth 20 feet by 30 feet and used as a quartermaster storeroom; the fifth also housed laundresses and measured 15 feet by 20 feet; and the sixth room uninhabitable.²⁰

No. 4. An old adobe, 20 feet by 60 feet, used as a hospital. Two adjoining rooms were uninhabitable.

No. 5. An old dilapidated adobe unfit for occupation. A stable occupied a corner room, 20 feet by 20 feet.²¹

Allen prepared a plan of the post that contributed additional features. Adobes 1 and 3 and the new frame barracks had porches along their fronts. Small rooms had been added to the rear of the officers' quarters by enclosing a rear porch. Also, a temporary kitchen for the officers' mess had been erected to the rear. The northwest corner of the compound contained a rectangle of "fallen down" adobe walls that possibly served as a corral. A picket fence surrounded the rest of the post.

In 1857 the Army constructed a frame, two story post hospital to replace the unsatisfactory one that had been established in an adobe. Time would show, however, that this new building was constructed in a flimsy manner.²²

The old Spanish Castillo de San Joaquin at Fort Point was not entirely neglected in this early period. Capt. Kimball Dimmick, New York Volunteers, recorded in his diary in May 1848, "Detailed to take charge of the working party to repair the old Fort and mount the Guns in Battery." When engineers

20. Four laundresses were authorized for each company. Some were married to soldiers; some were not. They received food rations and straw bedding (officers' wives received nothing). The position was abolished in 1878. This building also had a history. Parts of it later became comfortable officers' quarters that lasted until the 1906 earthquake.

21. Allen, May 15, 1855, OQMG, RG 92, NA.

22. The National Historic Landmark plaque on today's building 2 misidentifies the 1864 general hospital building as the 1857 post hospital. After 1864 the old 1857 building served other functions before being demolished in the 1870s or 1880s.

began their blasting operations at Fort Point in 1853, they first removed the American armament that had been mounted at the old castillo – four 32-pounder guns and two 8-inch howitzers. The assumption has been that the volunteers emplaced these weapons in 1848 about the time Captain Dimmick made his diary entry. Such was not the case.

In September, 1847 Colonel Mason wrote that the volunteers "have been engaged principally . . . in repairing the old presidio . . . Little or nothing has been done to the fort there, and as yet not one of the guns has been placed in the battery there." A few days later he said, "the guns, mortars, carriages, shot and shells are in the town in the open air, protected by paint alone. The great difficulty of hauling such articles over the rugged hills . . . will prevent their being hauled this season."

A year later the exasperated colonel wrote, "It was impossible to repair the old fort or to construct any new works with the volunteer garrison; and at this moment the guns, mortars, shot, and shells are lying in the town of San Francisco, not twenty yards from the place where they were first disembarked.

Not until the spring of 1849, after the volunteers had left the army, did the castillo receive armament. Brig. Gen. Persifor Smith, then headquartered in San Francisco temporarily, took action, "I propose to mount six pieces at the point, viz: four 32-pounders and two 8-inch howitzers." He added, "No work will be done except laying the platforms as the site of this fortification will most probably have to be cut down in regularly fortifying the harbor."²³

The Division's staff engineer, Lt. Henry Halleck, wrote in 1853, "In my opinion it would be useless to mount any guns in that battery in its present state." To be of any use at all, the work would have to be rebuilt. On reading Halleck's report, the Board of Engineers for the Pacific Coast concluded that "the repairing and arming of the old battery at the entrance of San Francisco bay will not be included in any plan of defense for that locality." A year later the officer in charge of the works reported, "An old Spanish redan of brick which crowned the promontory has been removed and its material secured. The guns formerly mounted in the work have also been removed." In addition, a lighthouse that had recently been

23. Dimmick, *Diary*, May 7, 1848; Col. R.B. Mason, September 18, 1847; October 7, 1847; and August 23, 1848, all to the Adjutant General, USA; Brig. Gen Persifor F. Smith, March 6, 1849, to Mason; and March 15, 1849, to the Adjutant General USA, all five letters in House Executive Document. 17, pp. 338, 356, 601, 711, and 714.

erected in the center of the battery was demolished.²⁴

In 1853-1854 the Engineers blasted away and excavated the promontory. They reduced the elevation of the headland from 97 feet to one of 16 feet, and commenced construction of a new masonry fort. George Tays, describing this event in his landmark study of the castillo, added an intriguing note, "the only vestige of the old works that was left was the rear wall of the guard house at the south west end of the fort. The edge of the cut came to the inner face of the wall." People continue to search for this fragment of history.²⁵

D. A Supply of Water

San Francisco's rapid growth during the gold rush resulted in a demand for a potable water supply. Water-carriers, who peddled water on mules or carts, drew from wells or springs on the peninsula or from Mountain Lake, which lay southwest of the ancient Presidio. Competition arose about 1850 when the Sausalito Water Company in Marin began shipping water by barge to San Francisco. The United States government officially established the boundaries of the Presidio that same year, boundaries that placed Mountain Lake within the reserve. The city continued to grow and it soon became apparent that its water needs demanded a greater increase in capital investment that had existed.

Mountain Lake as a source of potable water for the citizens of San Francisco appeared to be a promising venture in 1851 when Azro D. Merrifield organized the Mountain Lake Water Company under a special act of the California legislature. He obtained a contract from the City of San Francisco that gave him a twenty-four-year grant to provide water to public and private interests. Merrifield then changed his plans and left San Francisco that same year, but not before he sold his franchise to a local group. This new Mountain Lake Water Company did not begin work until the city granted it a monopoly in 1852. Even then the going was tough – labor disputes, economic depression, and the like. Ground breaking finally took place on May 14, 1853.

24. Halleck, January 31, 1852, to Totten; Col. I.L. Smith, March 3, 1852, to Totten; and Lt. William H. Whiting, September 15, 1853, to Totten, all in Letters Received, 1838-1866; Capt. James L. Mason, July 15, 1853, to Totten, PSF, Land Papers, all in OCE, RG 77, NA.

25. George Tays, "Castillo de San Joaquin, Registered Landmark #82," California Historical Landmarks Series, Vernon Aubrey Neasham, editor (Berkeley 1936). The wall was uncovered, and probably destroyed, by construction of the Golden Gate Bridge.

For a few months in 1853 the *Alta California* carried glowing accounts of progress in constructing the 3,500-foot "Mountain Lake Tunnel" through a hill about one-half mile south of the Presidio. The aqueduct when finished would be three miles in length and end at Larkin Street. Within six months, however, the company failed. No further effort to tap the resources of Mountain Lake or Lobos Creek occurred until 1857.²⁶

These events took place even though Mountain Lake lay within the boundaries of the Presidio of San Francisco military reservation. The Presidio itself in those early years depended on springs on the reserve for a supply of water. An army map prepared in 1870 showed "Queen Springs," probably today's El Polin Spring, south of the main post, and a pipeline running from it to the south end of the post in the vicinity of the bachelor officers' quarters. When construction began at Fort Point the Army laid a 2-inch redwood pipeline from a spring about 3,200 feet south of the engineers' wharf (possibly in the vicinity of Fort Winfield Scott's officers' club, 1331), to a reservoir on the bluff above the wharf.²⁷

While the Mountain Lake Water Company slumbered, John Bensley and others formed the San Francisco Water Works Company, popularly called the Bensley Water Company and after a difficult struggle they acquired permission from the City and County Board of Supervisors in August 1857 to provide the city with water.²⁸ The new company purchased part of the Lobos Creek Ranch south of the Presidio thus acquiring rights to one half of Lobos Creek's water; the U.S. Army claimed the other half. Earlier the company had forwarded a request to Col. Rene De Russy, Corps of Engineers, seeking permission to construct a flume from the creek north on the Presidio's ocean side, across Fort Point, then eastward to a point beyond Point San Jose (Black Point, Fort Mason). The company said that if the request was approved water could be supplied to Fort Point and the main post free of cost. The War Department approved the request in February 1857 and issued a special use permit having three conditions:

26. Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856, From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 182-183; *Alta California*, October 11, 1852, May 13 and August 12, 1853, and August 7, 1857; James P. Delgado, "The Bensley Water System: The Politics, Planning, and Construction of San Francisco's First Water System" (San Francisco: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1980), pp. 1-3.

27. G.M. Wheeler, map, "Presidio of San Francisco, 1870," RG 77, NA; Bearss, *Fort Point*, p. 231.

28. *Alta California*, December 6, 1859.

1. The government could cancel the permit at any time.
2. The aqueduct be completed in a timely manner.
3. Sections of the aqueduct not commanded by the guns of Fort Point be buried (i.e., a tunnel carried the aqueduct through the escarpment south of the fort).²⁹

When the Mountain Lake Water Company learned of this agreement it wrote the Secretary of War requesting that it be annulled inasmuch as similar permission had already been granted to Mountain Lake. The Engineer Department searched its files but could find no documentation giving that company permission to lay pipe through government grounds.³⁰

The date of completion of the Bensley aqueduct has not been firmly established. The *Alta California* reported on February 15, 1860, that "water is now conducted by iron pipes to 644 consumers." A year later President Bensley reported to the Board of Supervisors that 22.5 miles of pipe and three reservoirs had been constructed. Consumption in 1860 had been 500,000 gallons per day; this had increased to 700,000 by July 1861. There now were 1,600 consumers and 193 hydrants.³¹

The most complete description of the aqueduct that has been found was a circa 1930 newspaper article by Otto W. Degen, an employee in the Quartermaster Department at Fort Mason. He wrote that a wooden sheet pile dam had been constructed across Lobos Creek about 500 feet north of the 25th Avenue bridge. This raised the water to the needed height. A two by two-foot wooden plank flume followed along the cliffs on the ocean shore to Fort Point. At Fort Point a 2,812-foot tunnel led across the promontory back of the brick shot forges. From there the flume continued hanging along the bluff to a point to the rear of Crissy Field's headquarters building, 651. There the flume changed to a 26-inch cement pipe following the slight grade along the side of the higher ground on the south side of Crissy Field to near the 1930s post exchange where the War Department erected a small pumping plant, probably by 1862. The water was pumped to the Holabird reservoirs, capacity 438,000 and 70,000 gallons at the south end of the post.

The 26-inch cement pipe led from the pump house along the rear of later Letterman General Hospital,

29. H.G. Wright, September 1, 1856, to DeRussy; DeRussy, December 19, 1856, to Secretary of War, in "Fort Point and Presidio Reservation, 1845," Bulky File, OCE, RG 77, NA; Bearss, *Fort Point*, pp. 121-122.

30. U.S. Engineer Department, November 30, 1857, to Secretary of War, Bulky File, OCE, RG 77, NA.

31. *Alta California*, February 16, 1860, and July __, 1861.

then south of Bay Street to near Laguna and Bay where it changed to a wooden flume again, going around Fort Mason. It ended at the company's pump house at the foot of Van Ness Avenue. This flume supplied about 1.5 million gallons per day. The flume around Fort Mason was later changed to a 4 by 4-foot brick tunnel under the fort from about Laguna and Bay streets to west of the brick chimney of the company's pumping plant, about 2,800 feet in length.³²

Boards covered the flume to provide a walkway for maintenance purposes and to keep debris from falling into it. People soon discovered this to be a novel hike:

Beyond Black Point we climbed a trestle and mounted a flume that was our highway to the sea. Through this flume the city was supplied with water. The flume was a square trough, open at the top and several miles in length. It was cased in a heavy frame; and along the timbers that crossed over it lay planks, one after another, wherever the flume was uncovered. this narrow path, intended for the convenience of the workmen who kept the flume in repair, was our delight. . . . Sometimes we were many feet in the air, crossing a cove where the sea broke at high tide; sometimes we were in cut among the rocks on a jutting point; and sometimes the sand from the desert above us drifted down and buried the flume, now roofed over, quite out of sight.³³

An archeological report in 1975 stated that traces of the ancient flume could still be found along the Presidio's ocean headlands, "fragments of wooden planks, possibly the bottom of the flume . . . portions of concrete supports for the flume . . . [and] a short section of flume sides and bottom are still visible as imbedded in the earthen material of the seaciff."³⁴

The water company also constructed a well or shaft near the Arguello Boulevard (1st Avenue) gate in 1858. It measured several feet in diameter, uncased, and an unknown depth (some said 180 feet). The company abandoned the well sometime during the Civil War. About 1880 the Army erected a windmill and a pump there along with an 800-gallon tank. The post quartermaster used this water source for road

32. O.W. Degen, "Development of the San Francisco Water Supply System, Part 1 - Original Sources," unidentified newspaper clipping, GCGF, OQMG, RG 92, NA.

33. Delgado, "The Bensley Water System," p. 4

34. Roger E. Kelly, *Archaeological Resources of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area* (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1976), p. 61.

sprinkling and irrigation. By 1896 all the equipment was in bad shape and the supply of water was scarcely sufficient for the gatekeeper.³⁵

In 1862 the Bensley Water Company asked to use water from Mountain Lake. The War Department readily agreed but was surprised that the company did not already have permission. The only restriction that Washington imposed was that the company not tunnel northward through Presidio Hill but employ a route from the pond to the head of Lobos Creek. It warned that the company should not expect to have a monopoly on lake water. The company promptly objected to this restriction.³⁶

Shortly after Bensley had formed his water company, George H. Ensign established the Spring Valley Water Company, which quickly became a major competitor in supplying water to San Francisco. In 1864 local newspapers reported a "gigantic swindle" involving the water companies. The authorities arrested three Bensley Company employees for grand larceny in the theft of \$80,000 worth of water from the Spring Valley Company by tapping into its main pipeline and "receiving nearly 1,000,000 gallons of water every 24 hours, for several months." In the settlement the Bensley firm agreed to pay the costs of the damage and later that year the two companies consolidated under the Spring Valley name. The new organization took over the management of the Presidio flume and the pumping station at Black Point.³⁷

Advances in artillery during the Civil War resulted in making masonry forts like the work at Fort Point obsolete. Army engineers at San Francisco began planning for new batteries on the headlands at Fort Point (East and West Batteries). They soon discovered that the water flume occupied precisely the positions selected for gun emplacements. The flume could not be closed – the water supply of about 3,000,000 gallons per day was too valuable. Moreover, the company had fulfilled its agreement to supply water without cost to Fort Point, the Presidio, and Point San Jose. Seeking a solution the company made surveys to determine if a tunnel could be dug to avoid the batteries. Such a tunnel, however, would be a mile in length and would take two or three years to construct. The only other solution would be for the company to move its pumping engines from Point San Jose to Lobos Creek, pump the water up a hill

35. O.F. Long, August 18, 1896, to CO, PSF, Register of Letters Received, RG 393, NA.

36. Totten, December 11, 1862, to DeRussy, Letters to Engineer Officers, OCE, RG 77, NA.

37. Delgado, "The Bensley Water System," pp. 7-8.

overlooking the creek (Rob?), and allow the water to flow by gravitation to the city.³⁸

Whatever compromises were reached, the flume remained and continued to deliver water to the city. In 1879 when the West Battery was completed and work had ceased on East Battery, a report concerning the water supply stated that the flume still carried abundant and excellent water to the main post. A steam engine forced the water to a reservoir at the southern, higher end of the post from where it was piped to the different buildings. As for waste water, pipes emptied it into a large covered sewer on either side of the post and discharged it into tide water.³⁹

Col. William H. French, the Presidio's commander visited the Lobos Creek area in January 1878. He examined the three springs at the head of the creek saying the water welled up through the sand and flowed into a small protected reservoir. He commented on the clarity of the water at the source noting that there was no connection with the water in Mountain Lake. The water company had laid a pipe between the two in the 1860s but had never had cause to use it.⁴⁰

Fort Point's water supply came under discussion in 1887. At that time its water supply came from both the old spring southeast of the point and the Spring Valley flume. A windmill drew water from the flume to a tank and another windmill raised the water from the tank to a reservoir on Telegraph (Rob) Hill. This reservoir also supplied water to the national cemetery. The system did not work well because strong winds wrecked the windmills from time to time or, just as bad, the winds proved too gentle to operate the windmills. In any case there was not enough pressure to fight building fires. The post quartermaster recommended abandoning the flume and either placing pumping machinery at Lobos Creek and a reservoir on Telegraph Hill large enough to supply water to the entire reservation or, preferably, if a good well could be developed then place a large reservoir on Presidio Hill. In March 1888 the War Department approved \$1,200 for test borings for wells.⁴¹

38. Elliot, June 9, 1869, to Humphreys, Land Papers, OCE, RG 77, NA.

39. U.S. Army, *Outline Descriptions of Military Posts in the Military Division of the Pacific*, 1879, p. 91.

40. W.H. French, January 29, 1878, to Department of California, PSF, Letters Sent, RG 393, NA.

41. J.S. Oyster, December 29, 1887, to Department of California, CCF, OQMG, RG 92, NA. Oyster also mentioned two other windmills on the reservation - the one near the 1st Avenue (Arguello) gate, and one near the southeast corner of the reservation that drew water from a "pond or catchment basin." Both provided water for irrigation and

In September the quartermaster reported on the experimental boring of test holes saying that three had been dug. All produced clear water, one of which gave eight gallons per minute. Apparently the results proved unsatisfactory for three years later another artesian well was opened and a sample of the water sent to the post surgeon for analysis.

From time to time friction developed between the Presidio and the adjacent U.S. Marine Hospital. Such was the case in 1892 when Colonel Graham wrote to the "Officer in Charge" of the hospital pointing out that several acres of the hospital's large garden adjoined Mountain Lake and that the hospital put large amounts of manure on those acres. The War Department, said the colonel, had full responsibility for assuring a pure water supply in Mountain Lake and Lobos Creek and he desired that gardening in that area cease.⁴²

The Presidio's water supply faced a major crisis in 1893 when a large landslide on the ocean side wiped out a portion of the Spring Valley flume. The company immediately installed a 6-inch iron pipe around the slide in order to maintain the flow of water to the post. This solution was soon plagued with frequent breakdowns. Further, only 10,000 gallons per hour reached the post, an insufficient amount. If that were not enough, a report in November stated that a sewer at 21st Avenue threatened fatal contamination to Lobos Creek. About this time the Spring Valley Water Company ceased using Lobos water for the city and the Presidio assumed responsibility for repairing the flume.⁴³

Through 1894 the Presidio experienced a series of problems with the delivery of water. At one point a hose used at the break gave out leaving the Presidio with only a two-day supply of water. When ocean storms arrived in the fall the waves at high tide washed out the bench on which a temporary flume stood. Finally the Spring Valley Water Company announced that it would abandon the flumes and aqueducts

(..continued)
road sprinkling.

42. Post quartermaster, September 8, 1888, to CO, PSF, Register of Letters Received; Post adjutant, March 19, 1891, to Post surgeon; and W. Graham, August 12, 1892, to OIC, Marine Hospital, Letters Sent, PSF, RG 393, NA.

43. Post quartermaster, August 31 and November 10, 1883, to CO, PSF; Graham, November 10, 1893, to Department of California, PSF, RG 393, NA; Harts, *Report*, p. 23. Spring Valley then depended on Crystal Springs and San Andreas lakes to the south for city water.

that it had maintained on federal property by license.⁴⁴

While struggling with the flume situation the Army also began constructing a new water system for the Presidio. In 1894 a pumping plant and a system of driven and open wells were installed in the southwest portion of the reservation. Some of the wells reached a depth of 110 feet. By midsummer the flume had been reconstructed and its use resumed. In 1896 the Quartermaster Department began the excavation of a tunnel starting at the small ravine southwest of the new brick barracks (the bowl below Infantry Terrace). Costing \$10,000 the tunnel extended under Presidio Hill for about 2,000 feet before it was abandoned. No quantity of water was found and the project was considered a failure. In 1897 the post quartermaster constructed a large concrete reservoir, 1469, near the mortar battery McKinnon-Stotsenberg then under construction.⁴⁵

The arrival of Spanish-American War volunteers at San Francisco in 1898 placed a further strain on the Army's water supply. At first the Quartermaster Department considered connecting the Presidio's pumping plant with Mountain Lake to supply water to the volunteers' Camp Merritt south of the Presidio. Army doctors, however, considered the scheme to be inadvisable. Mountain Lake water had become polluted from both the Marine Hospital and from citizens' homes along "Lake Street." The Army then arranged to have city water supplied to the volunteers.⁴⁶

A visit from an inspector general in 1900 shed further light on the Presidio's water supply. Mountain Lake no longer supplied any water. The Presidio's wells could supply only a third of the reservation's requirements. The Army purchased the other two thirds from Spring Valley. In 1901 the company placed a pumping plant on the south bank of Lobos Creek near its mouth and directed the entire flow of the stream to the pipe system of the Richmond District to the south. The Board of Supervisors, however, condemned the water as unfit for drinking. Lobos Creek then poured 2,000,000 gallons per day directly

44. Post quartermaster, July 2 and November 3, 1894; AAG Department of California, October 22, 1894, to CO; PSF, Register of Letters Received, RG 393, NA.

45. O.W. Degen, "Water Supply System," RG 92, NA; Harts, *Report*, p. 20. It is not clear if the Army had planned to tunnel clear through Presidio Hill. The piping system for the new reservoir remains an unknown factor. Post Quartermaster, July 10, 1894, to CO, PSF, Register of Letters Received, RG 393, NA.

46. Chief quartermaster, Department of California, May 9, 1898, to Chief surgeon, Register of Letters Received, PSF, RG 393, NA. Another problem: a year later a city sewer emptied directly into the lake.

into the ocean. "An utter loss," said Major Harts in 1907.⁴⁷

A comprehensive account of the Presidio's water system appeared three years later, in 1904. Water for the post came from wells near Mountain Lake and from the Spring Valley Water Company mains. Ten wells: one 16-inch, eight 20-inch, and one 45-inch, had a capacity of 13,100 gallons per hour. Water from Mountain Lake was pumped into a small reservoir and used for fire and sprinkler purposes. Water for the quartermaster mule stable on the bay shore came from an artesian well in the Lower Presidio (100 gallons per hour). Presidio water was also delivered to Fort Baker, the discharge camp on Angel Island, and the transport tug *Slocum* for her own use.

The average capacity of the 1901 plant was 156,116 gallons for domestic use and 74,139 gallons for fire and sprinkling purposes per day, thus the permanent connection to the city main. Machinery at the pumping works included:

Pumps

- 1 duplex Dow
- 2 dry-air duplex Dow
- 1 Smith-Vaile vacuum
- 1 Hooker deep well
- 3 Thompson & Evans deep well
- 2 Snow fuel oil

Boilers

- 1 Risdom Iron Works 80-horsepower tubular
- 1 Union Iron Works 80-horsepower tubular

Tanks

- 2 wooden storage, 20,000 gallons each
- 1 wooden storage, 5,000 gallons
- 2 wooden settling, 5,000 gallons each
- 2 wooden settling, 3,000 gallons each

Reservoirs

- 1 cement and brick, 488,000 gallons
- 1 cement, 112,000 gallons
- 1 cement, 140,000 gallons at Fort Point
- 1 cement, 80,000 at Fort Point

47. CO, PSF, April 4, 1900, to Department of California, Letters Sent, RG 393, NA; Harts, *Report*, p. 25.

This system when fully installed, together with improvements and extensions, cost the Army \$51,137. Yet a water shortage continued. A company commander complained in December 1904 that the water for his outfit was cut off every few days from one to four hours.⁴⁸

In his annual report to Washington in 1907 the Pacific Division commander, Brig. Gen. Frederick Funston, bluntly stated that the question of an adequate water supply for the Presidio of San Francisco continued to be a most serious one, "For years this matter has dragged along," adding that the Lobos Creek project had been written about until it was threadbare. Not quite threadbare, for that same year Maj. William Harts wrote his comprehensive plan for the future of the Presidio. Concerning the water supply the major developed a host of recommendations:

- Purchase the south bank of Lobos Creek
- Construct a stone boundary wall with an iron fence on top.
- Divert all storm water and surface drainage away from the creek.
- Construct a permanent dam on the creek.
- Set up filters.
- Construct a wet well.
- Construct a pumping station having a capacity of 2,000,000 gallons per day.
- Provide 14-inch cast iron pipe and lay from pumps to a reservoir near Battery Stotsenberg.
- Construct a distribution system.⁴⁹

The Presidio published a circular in 1909 that highlighted the continuing shortage of water and urging the garrison to economize. Then, finally, the War Department authorized the construction of a new pumping plant near the mouth of Lobos Creek. Construction took place 1910-1912. the principal structures were

- Water reservoir, 1770, built in 1910
- Water valve house, 1771, built in 1910
- Water filtration plant, 1773, built in 1910
- Water treatment plant, 1776, built in 1912
- Water settling plant, 1778, built in 1911
- Water treatment plant, 1779, built in 1912
- Civilian housing, 1781, built in 1911

Harts' recommendation for a reservoir on Presidio Hill was realized in 1912 when the huge reservoir,

48. U.S. Army, *Outline Description of Military Post and Reservations in the United States and Alaska* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904); CO, Company D, 21st Infantry, December 25, 1904, to CO, PSF, Register of Letters Received, PSF, RG 393, NA.

49. U.S. Army, *Annual Report, War Department 1907*, 3:185; Harts, *Report*, pp. 39-40.

313, with a capacity of 6,000,000 gallons, and the nearby valve house, 310, were completed.⁵⁰

For the first time in many years the Army was satisfied with the Presidio's water system. A 1912 report stated that the new plant supplied the entire post except the East Cantonment, which acquired its water from Spring Valley. The Presidio system now supplied the U.S. Army General Hospital, new Fort Winfield Scott, Alcatraz Island, Angel Island, Fort Baker, the harbor boats, Fort Mason, and the army transports and docks. An 8-inch pipe laid along the city streets supplied water to Fort Mason.⁵¹

Another of Major Harts' recommendations became reality in 1915 when the U.S. Army acquired 3.58 acres of land along the south bank of Lobos Creek as well as all rights of the Spring Valley Water Company and its successors. In 1924 three wells and the water in Lobos Creek were connected to the pumping plant and six additional wells were under construction. But by 1931 another water shortage had developed and rationing was again the order of the day. The problem was due to the declining flow in the creek. While Ninth Corps Area wished to connect the Presidio to the city water mains, the Quartermaster General believed that an additional shaft at the creek was the better answer. Apparently, this crisis passed without significant changes.⁵²

In its Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Presidio in 1991, the U.S. Army described Lobos Creek as the primary source of potable water located on the reservation. It provided sixty percent of the annual requirements, or 495 million gallons per year. In addition, Wells 6 and 13 in the Lobos Creek basin provided another ten percent. City water supplied the remainder. The Baker Beach plant treated 2.4 million gallons per day. Treatment included settling, chlorination, fluoridation, and filtering. Three wells and their pump houses supplied non-potable water to the Presidio Golf Course. Mountain Lake had a surface area of four acres and a maximum depth of fifteen feet. Lobos Creek, a separate water course, was supplied entirely by ground water and flowed perennially.⁵³

50. PSF, Circular 26, June 28, 1909, PSF Circulars 1909, RG 393, NA; NPS, National Register Forms, pp. 7-107 and 7-108.

51. F. Von Schrader, June 2, 1911, to AG, Department of California; J.B. Aleshire, August 22, 1912, to Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, PSF, General Correspondence, OQMG, RG 92, NA.

52. Extract from "Military Reservations - California," April 20, 1940, Fort Point and Presidio Historical Association; J.L. Shepard, July 1, 1924, Annual Sanitary Report, PSF; G.L. Hicks, July 29, 1931, both in PSF, GCGF, OQMG, RG 92, NA.

53. U.S. Army, Final Environmental Impact Statement, pp. 3-23 to 3-225 and 3-40.

Ansel Adams, the late famed California photographer, grew up near Lobos Creek:

With a resolute whisper, Lobos Creek flowed past our home on its mile-long journey to the ocean. It was bordered, at times covered, with watercress and alive with minnows, tadpoles, and a variety of larvae. Water bugs skimmed the open surfaces and dragonflies darted above the streambed. In spring flowers were rampant and fragrant. In heavy fog the creek was eerie, rippling out of nowhere and vanishing into nothingness.⁵⁴

A beachcomber today at Baker Beach may still wade across Lobos Creek's outlet as it vanishes into the ocean.

E. The Regulars

Following the departure of the volunteers, a detachment of the 1st U.S. Dragoons occupied the humble post until Company M, 3d Artillery, arrived in the spring of 1849. Plagued with desertions throughout the early 1850s, these few soldiers could hardly form a platoon, let alone a company. As 1853 ended the promise of reinforcements became a reality when the headquarters, band, and six companies of the 3d artillery, 600 people, departed New York Harbor aboard *San Francisco* bound for California. A great storm off Cape Hatteras smashed into the vessel disabling her. Then a gigantic wave followed and swept 160 passengers overboard. Finally a small vessel came upon the distressed ship and managed to take off more than 100 of the survivors before the seas forced it away. Five days passed before a second ship succeeded in rescuing the remainder. *San Francisco* was never seen again.⁵⁵

Elements of the 3d did reach California in 1854, by land and by sea. At the Presidio, Company L joined the command in May 1854, bringing the strength to 137 enlisted men temporarily. About the time of Company L's departure for Fort Vancouver in June, the division commander, Brig. Gen. John E. Wool, contemplated removing the Presidio's garrison completely. Capt. John G. Barnard, Corps of Engineers

54. Eve Iverson, "Water Supply at the Presidio of San Francisco," *California Geology* (December 1989), p. 270.

55. William Addleman Ganoe, *The History of the United States Army* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942), p. 235; Coffman, *The Old Army*, p. 124. More than 200 people died in the disaster. According to Coffman, the regimental commander, Col. William Gates, was one of the first to leave the stricken ship and was later suspended from command. Gates, however, remained on active duty until 1863, still in charge of the 3d Artillery.

and the senior engineer overseeing the construction of coastal defenses on the West Coast, alarmed about this possibility, wrote General Wool on the subject, "I feel it my duty to call your attention to the probable consequences of an entire removal of the garrison from the Presidio." He continued, "This reservation was made for the purpose of securing the site of the fortifications at Fort Point and their auxiliary out works and the fine location for barracks for troops at the Presidio . . . no part of it can be relinquished without serious detriment to the military service." He said that the two hills, Presidio and Redoubt (Rob) had been selected as the sites of redoubts to defend the coastal batteries against an attack on the land side. Also, "the Presidio is unquestionably the best site for barracks for troops on the Bay of San Francisco." Further, "nothing but the actual presence of a military force strong enough to repel intruders, prevents . . . the whole reserve from being occupied by squatters." Barnard's fears subsided; Company M remained and the Presidio's strength gradually increased.⁵⁶

During this period men desiring to join the Army had to meet a few requirements. They could range in age from twenty-one to thirty-five. Minimum height was set at five feet, three inches. Only whites served in the Army at that time and supposedly they knew the English language. In addition to the pay increases allowed on the West Coast, the enlisted pay scale army-wide was increased in 1854:

	Private	Corporal	Sergeant	Sergeant Major
Before 1854	\$7	9	13	17
1854	\$11	13	17	21

In addition each soldier received food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and transportation. In addition to their artillery duties, the Presidio's soldiers trained in all things infantry and, it will be noted, they fought as infantrymen and sometimes as cavalry in the Indian campaigns on the Pacific Slope. An inspector in 1852 noted that new recruits at the Presidio drilled twice a day, once as artillery and once as infantry.⁵⁷

56. Capt. J.G. Barnard, June 2, 1854, to Wool, Letters Received 1838-1866, OCE, RG 77, NA. A "History of the Presidio of San Francisco," prepared by Sixth U.S. Army, no date, erroneously concluded that the closure did take place and Company M transferred to the Pacific Northwest in 1854.

57. Coffman, *The Old Army*, pp. 138, 152-154, and 165; I.G. George A. McCall, May 25, 1852, to Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott, Letters Received, M391, 1852, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, RG 94, Microcopy 567, Roll 468, NA.

The post returns for this decade shed only small insights to garrison life. In July 1849 an enlisted man died, apparently of natural causes. An accidental death, details not given, occurred in October. A civilian, J.H. Van Mehr, became the Protestant chaplain in February 1850. He lost the position a year later when the Army struck the Presidio from the list of posts authorized to have chaplains.

The 1852 inspection disclosed that the Presidio had a stable of twelve horses and sixteen mules. Three of the horses were kept in the stable (Building 5) and received a ration of grain. Their duties involved express service and pursuit of deserters. The other nine horses survived on the Presidio's pastures. The post had two wagons and each was hauled by a six-mule team. They hauled lumber for construction and wood for fuel. The soldiers had to cut their own fuel and in 1852 had to travel as far as a mile to gather the scanty supply.⁵⁸

By 1859 the engineers neared completion of the large masonry fort at Fort Point. An enterprising citizen of San Francisco, A.W. Morris, concluded that the site would be a great place to have a tavern. Not only the civilian workmen at the fort but curious visitors from San Francisco would enjoy refreshments. He secured the signatures of 500 citizens who supported this concept and forwarded the petition to a contact in Washington, D.C. When the request "to erect a small house" reached the War Department, Secretary of War John B. Floyd passed it on to the Engineer Department for comment. The response came back that such an establishment would be a serious injury to public service. Secretary Floyd, however, granted permission. The engineers continued to object and in the spring of 1860 the Secretary reversed his decision and Morris' plan was doomed. One citizen did get access to the reservation. Captain Keyes recalled, "I permitted a man to fence a piece of ground to the west of the Presidio [i.e., to the west of the post], and to cultivate it as a garden, on shares, for the garrison." The soil was rich and with the addition of a little water, it produced a bountiful crop.⁵⁹

The number of officers at the Presidio during the 1850s varied in number from one to eight, but most often four or five. Several of them acted as post commander during Keyes' absences. Principal among them were Capt. Charles S. Merchant from August 1851 to September 1852 and in 1859-1860 after Keyes had transferred, Lt. Horatio G. Gibson at various times after 1856, and Lt. John H. Lendrum at

58. McCall, May 25, 1852.

59. Summary of correspondence, 1859-1860 in "Fort Point & Presidio Reservation," Bulky File, OCE, RG 77, NA; Keyes, *Fifty Years*, p. 247.

times in 1857-1858. All three were 3d Artillery. Other officers of note included gruff-looking Capt. Edward O.C. Ord, 3d Artillery, a company officer who in a few years would rise to major general during the Civil War, and Post Surgeon Robert Murray who had served in the 1st New York Volunteers and who became the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, 1883-1886. Capt. Lewis A. Armistead, 6th Infantry, served at the Presidio of San Francisco briefly in 1858-1859. He joined the Confederate army in 1861 and in 1862 became a brigadier general. On the third day of the battle of Gettysburg, July 1863, Armistead led his troops in "Pickett's Charge" on Cemetery Ridge. Mortally wounded, he fell within Union lines, at the spot marking the "high tide of the Confederacy."

When the 3d Artillery suffered its disaster at sea in 1853, wives and children of officers and sergeants were on board the sinking ship. But army regulations at that time did not recognize the existence of wives, only laundresses, and no accounts of their presence at the Presidio have yet been found. Later accounts showed that Presidio families greatly enjoyed San Francisco's social and cultural life. Bachelor officers also found San Francisco's society a delightful adventure. Lt. James Birdseye McPherson, stationed on lonely Alcatraz Island, wrote a friend describing New Year's Eve in San Francisco: "Knowing that you are interested in the Ladies I must tell you that the hauties of San Francisco were there, admired with more, than the Queen of Sheba, when she made her appearance at the Court of Solomon – am I right – ever desirous of – Silks & Satins, laces and head dresses, gas-light and diamonds, all tended to produce almost dazzling effect, from which I am happy to say I suffered no serious inconveniences".⁶⁰

An inspector general in 1852 found the Presidio's officers to be "well acquainted with their duties, and appear to discharge them with zeal." Two years later another visitor noted that Lieutenant Lendrum, then acting commanding officer, was "an ambitious and meritorious young officer," but he had too many responsibilities, more than one man could handle.⁶¹ Overworked and underpaid, the junior officers survived the raging inflation and California's growing pains. Many of them took up outside enterprises in order to make ends meet. Some, like Folsom, grew rich by investing in real estate. A few others, such as Capt. George Crook, 4th Infantry, supplemented income by farming.⁶² Sherman resigned from the Army

60. William F. Strobebridge, ed., "California Letters of Major General James McPherson, 1858-1860," *Ohio History*, 81: 43-44.

61. McCall, May 26, 1852; Frazer, ed. *Mansfield*, p. 137.

62. Capt. George Crook transferred from Fort Ter-Waw in northern California to the

and returned to San Francisco as a banker.

Captain Keyes supplemented his income in several ways. Soon after his arrival in San Francisco he received \$500 for designing a city wharf. He also invested in real estate, but lost nearly everything in the great fire of 1851. Not discouraged, he later acquired a rich piece of property on Montgomery Street, San Francisco's future financial district.

All of them found the city intriguing. Crook, on his first arrival in 1852, observed the conglomeration of frame buildings and the streets deep in sand. Everything was excitement and bustle, he said, and prices exorbitant. Common laborers had higher incomes than army officers. Ulysses S. Grant, en route to Fort Jones in northern California, witnessed a similar scene that year. But when he returned to San Francisco just two years later, "Gambling houses had disappeared from public view. The city had become staid and orderly." General Hitchcock contributed to the growing city when he moved down from Benicia. He sold most of his 2,000-volume personal library to the city. It became the basis for the Mercantile Library Association. Lieutenant McPherson penned his observations in 1858:

San Francisco beats all the cities I have ever been in, in the way of Drinking Saloons, Billiard Tables, Cigar Stores and idle men "loafers" genteelly dressed, and if you accidentally [sic] to make an acquaintance of one of them, before you are aware of it, you will be introduced to any number more – for they have the greatest way of introducing folk I have ever seen.⁶³

The Presidio itself changed but little as the 1850s came to a close. A reporter from the *Alta California* rode out to the reservation on a fine fall day in 1857:

At the corner of Washington and Pacific streets, he boarded one of Bowman & Gardner's four-horse omnibuses. A 40-minute ride through Spring Valley, past the toll-gate, along the marge of Washerwoman's Bay, and by a number of ranches, brought the conveyance to the end of its route to Presidio House [a place of refreshment just outside the reservation boundary near the Lombard Street gate]. Disembarking, the reporter

(..continued)

Presidio of San Francisco in June 1861. Remaining there but briefly he transferred to the East where he rose to the rank of major general of volunteers in the Union Army. Following the Civil War he engaged in campaigns against the Sioux and Cheyennes, and in Arizona against the Apaches. Major General Crook died on active duty in 1890.

63. George Crook, *General George Crook, His Autobiography*, ed. Martin F. Schmitt (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 6; E.B. Long, ed., *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, pp. 104-105; Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 384 and 398; Strobridge, "McPherson," 81:38.

continued on foot, passing to the north of the Presidio. Only a few of the old adobe structures were occupied by the army. Nearby were the new wooden buildings. To the south, the traveler caught a glimpse of the "famed Mountain Lake Water Co.," and a road leading over the hills to Lone Mountain Cemetery. A 20-minute walk along a "fair road" built by the military brought the reporter to the [engineer] wharf [at Fort Point].⁶⁴

F. Military Operations, 1850s

The California gold rush almost inevitably brought clashes between the Indian and miner. In 1848-1849 the Presidio's tiny garrison could do little as peacemaker. One early clash occurred in the Coloma area east of Sutter's Fort in 1849 where miners and Indians retaliated against each other. That fall Lt. William Warner, who had surveyed the Presidio reservation, set out on an exploring expedition searching for a railway route. Pit River Indians ambushed him near Goose Lake in northeastern California in September. During the winter of 1849-1850, Indians in the vicinity of Clear Lake, ninety miles north of San Francisco, killed wandering prospectors. The deaths of Warner and the others led the Army to take action in the spring of 1850. Lt. Nathaniel Lyon, 2d Infantry, (not a Presidio officer) led a force of dragoons and infantry first to Clear Lake shooting down from sixty to one hundred Indians, possibly Pomos, then to the nearby Russian River where the soldiers killed upward of 150 more. In July another army expedition clashed with Pit River people in an effort to avenge the death of Lieutenant Warner. Presidio troops did not take part in these engagements.⁶⁵

Because the Army was quite ineffectual in the miner-Indian clashes, white citizens organized themselves into military bands. One such outfit was the "Mariposa Battalion" which marched into the Sierra Nevada in 1851. While it had limited success in killing Indians, it did discover the magnificent Yosemite Valley.⁶⁶

In May 1851 Captain Keyes led a large infantry escort for Indian Commissioner John McKee, Dr. O.M. Wozencroft, and a Mr. Barbour to inland California to deal with various groups of Indians. Part of the commission turned north and traveled up the Sacramento River. Keyes remained with the other portion

64. Bearss, *Fort Point*, p. 103.

65. William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), pp. 279-280; John Walton Caughey, *California* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953), p. 321; Utley, *Frontiersmen In Blue*, pp. 175-176.

66. Caughey, *California*, p. 321; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 101 and 175-176.

journeying through the San Joaquin Valley southward all the way to Los Angeles. On this trip, the captain gave up tobacco forever and he enjoyed the otherwise uneventful journey.⁶⁷

Closer to home, the army post at the Golden Gate at last received a name, in 1851. Until then the returns had been headed "Post Return of San Francisco, California," although the locals freely referred to the post as the Presidio. Also, President Fillmore in his executive order of November 1850 referred to the reservation as the "Presidio." The August 1851 return, however, proudly displayed the headline, "Post Return of the Presidio of San Francisco, Cal.," and the Remarks section noted that War Department General Orders 34, June 25, 1851, had "made changes in the names of certain posts."⁶⁸

Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, commanding the Division of the Pacific, moved his headquarters from Benicia to San Francisco in June 1852. He had already visited the Presidio where he "listened with delight to the surf breaking on the rocks below – relief from the everlasting talk about "property," "water lots," etc. Great God!" In the following year he learned that one William Walker was organizing a filibustering expedition in San Francisco to overthrow the Mexican government in neighboring Sonora. President Fillmore had ordered Hitchcock to prevent such undertakings. Now, the U.S. district attorney, S.W. Inge, advised him to seize *Arrow*, a vessel that was being outfitted for a large number of passengers and arms. Hitchcock ordered Captain Keyes to take his Presidio troops to seize the brig. Keyes did so on September 30. Walker then claimed the ship and its cargo and a crowd of citizens threatened to take back the vessel by force. Hitchcock told the soldiers to move *Arrow* out in the stream. That done, the troops withdrew from the vessel on October 4. Politics entered the picture and the new Secretary of War Jefferson Davis directed Hitchcock to cease his activities. Shortly thereafter Brig. Gen. John Wool succeeded Hitchcock as division commander, and moved the headquarters back to Benicia. Once again, Keyes and his small band of warriors had plugged a breach. Reflecting on the event, Maj. Edward D. Townsend, Hitchcock's adjutant general, wrote, "One result has certainly been that filibusters now go &

67. [U.S. Army], *The Army at the Golden Gate, A Guide to Army Posts in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program, Works Projects Administration [ca. 1940], pp. 14-15; Keyes, *Fifty Years*, p. 232.

68. It has not been possible to read that general order. For whatever reason the U.S. Army decided in 1938 to issue another general order naming the reservation. War Department, General Orders 3, May 24, 1938, "The military reservation situated at the location indicated is named as follows. Presidio of San Francisco, San Francisco, Calif." Chief of Staff Gen. Malin Craig signed the order. Did he perhaps recall his days at the Presidio as a young officer and, later, as a general?

come as they chose, and no one cares a straw."⁶⁹

Captain Keyes reconnoitered the newly established Nome Lackee Indian reservation in northern California in the fall of 1854. He selected a camp site for a detachment of 3d Artillery soldiers that marched there in January 1855. Keyes revisited the camp in July 1855 when Lt. John Edwards, Company B, 3d Artillery, commanded the outpost. A Presidio officer, Lt. John H. Lendrum, commanded the Nome Lackee detachment in June 1857, and from then until March 1858 Lt. Michael R. Morgan, 3d Artillery and formerly stationed at the Presidio, commanded the detachment.⁷⁰

In November 1855 Keyes and Company M, 3d Artillery, received orders to proceed to the Pacific Northwest on detached service where several Indian tribes had taken up arms both east and west of the Cascade Range. In the spring of 1856 the "War of Puget Sound" was fought and quickly ended. When a large force of Klikitat Indians attacked a company of the 9th Infantry, Keyes' Company M counterattacked. At a cost of two men killed and eight wounded, M Company scattered the Indians. Other fights occurred in the Pacific Northwest throughout much of that year. Keyes and his men, now experienced in combat, reached their Presidio home in October.⁷¹

The artillerymen had almost twenty months to revisit their favorite San Francisco haunts. In April 1857 they left San Francisco by steamer, ascended the Sacramento River, and proceeded to Fort Jones west of Yreka. Hardly had they reached their destination when they were ordered to return to their Presidio barracks. It must have been a pleasant excursion, and at government expense. Lt. Horatio G. Gibson led a detachment from Company M, 3d Artillery, from the Presidio to northern California where he established Camp Bragg on the Mendocino Indian reservation on the coast in June 1857. In September Gibson received permission to rename the post Fort Bragg. The detachment remained on the reservation for one year. In June 1858 Gibson and his men returned to the Presidio. A month earlier Captain Keyes had announced that Company M would return to Washington Territory where the Army had suffered a

69. Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, pp. 394-395 and 400; Edwards, ed. *Diary of Townsend*, pp. 91-96; Carl P. Schlicke, *General George Wright, Guardian of the Pacific Coast* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 103-104.

70. William F. Strobridge, *Regulars in the Redwoods, The U.S. Army in Northern California, 1852-1861* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark, 1994), pp. 109-113, 140, and 263.

71. Uteley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 191 and 194; Post Returns, November 1855 and October 1856; U.S. Army, War Department, *Annual Report*, December 5, 1857, pp. 51-58.

serious blow on the Columbia plateau when a combined Indian force had defeated Maj. E.J. Steptoe and his large command.⁷²

At The Dalles and Fort Walla Walla, Col. George Wright organized a command to march north toward the Spokane country near the Canadian border to avenge Steptoe. There a combined force of Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Palouse, and other Indians awaited the bluecoats. Wright appointed Keyes to command a battalion of six 3d Artillery companies and made him second in command of the whole force. Other fighters in this campaign included such old Presidio soldiers as E.O.C. Ord and James A. Hardie. The fighting climaxed at the Battle of Four Lakes on September 1, 1858, and the Battle of Spokane Plain a few days later with the defeat of the Indians. Keyes' performance had been outstanding.

Writing later, Keyes mused, "I doubt if in the history of our country there has ever been an Indian campaign in which as much was accomplished at an equal cost. The good result was due to three causes: The proper instruction of the soldiers at the commencement, the excellence of the quartermaster department, and the admirable fitness of our commander, Colonel George Wright." It would not be long before Wright came to San Francisco.⁷³

During the campaign Keyes learned that the 6th Infantry Regiment had reached California. He worried that it would garrison the Presidio (it did) and that he would be kept in the Pacific Northwest rather than at "the delightful Presidio". The Army, however, had other plans for him. In October at Fort Vancouver Keyes was promoted to major in the 1st Artillery Regiment with orders to report to Fort Monroe, Virginia. The icing on the cake was a year's leave that he spent in San Francisco.⁷⁴ The record is less clear as to the disposition of Company M. It probably formed a part of the large military escort that accompanied Lt. John Mullan who constructed a military road from Fort Benton on the Missouri to Fort Walla Walla from 1859 to 1862.

72. *Alta California*, May 1, 1857; Robert Ignatius Burns, *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 220-230; Strobridge, *Regulars in the Redwoods*, pp. 140-143. Strobridge, n.d., to Gordon Chappell, noted that the Fort Jones post returns made no mention of the Presidio's artilleryman reaching that post.

73. Utey, *Frontiersmen In Blue*, p. 204; Schlicke, *Wright*, pp. 146-175; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, House Ex. Doc. 44, 36th Cong., 2d sess., Report of Lieutenant Mullan, in charge of construction of the military road from Fort Benton to Fort Walla Walla; Burns, *Jesuits and Indian Wars*, pp. 287-289; Keyes, *Fifty Years*, pp. 265-282.

74. Keyes, *Fifty Years*, pp. 284 and 315-316.

Keyes did not get to Fort Monroe. In October 1859 the general in chief of the Army, Winfield Scott, visited San Francisco. Keyes, a former aide-de-camp to the old man, called on the general and dined with him at San Francisco's finest, the Oriental Hotel. Keyes left San Francisco in December and again visited General Scott in New York City where he learned that he was to be the general's military secretary. In that position he would again play a role in California's military history.

Following the departure of Company M, the Presidio's garrison fluctuated as recruits and organizations came and went. Two companies of the 6th Infantry occupied the post early in 1859, then left temporarily to join the Colorado Expedition in the vicinity of Yuma. Both companies transferred from the Presidio in June and July 1859 and the Presidio again became an artillery post with the arrival of the 3d artillery's headquarters, Lt. Col. Charles S. Merchant commanding, in July. Companies H and I joined in October. (The new fort at Fort Point neared completion.)⁷⁵

March 17, 1860, witnessed a unique event when the first Japanese ship, *Kanrin Maru*, ever to enter the Golden Gate sailed into view. She bore the first Japanese minister to the United States, Shimmi Buzen-no-Kami, and a party of Japanese nobles. Either the Presidio's or Alcatraz's guns, or perhaps both, thundered the appropriate salute. An engineer report a few days later read, "Ammunition used for salute to Japanese Embassy: 105 lbs. powder, 42 pr. cart. bags, 18 friction primers."⁷⁶

Before 1860 ended, Army troops were called out once more to fight in the Paiute War. As before, clashes between miners and settlers and the Paiute Indians in the Great Basin (then Utah Territory, which in 1861 became Nevada Territory) led to violence. Army units from the Bay Area traveled eastward, but only a small detachment came from the Presidio – two officers and eleven men from Companies I and M, 3d Artillery, armed with two howitzers. The Battle of Pinnacle Mount was declared a draw. Following the action, some of the regulars marched to the Big Bend of the Carson River and established a new fort named Churchill.⁷⁷

75. The whereabouts of the 3d Artillery's colonel, William Gates, at this time is unknown.

76. Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei, The First Americans, The Story of a People* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1992), p. 26; "Register of Materials Received, 1858-1863, April 5, 1860, San Francisco District, OCE, RG 77, NA.

77. Ferol Egan, *Sand in a Whirlwind, The Paiute Indian War of 1860* (Garden City:

A fitting close to this decade of the Presidio's history occurred around 1860 when a visitor rode out to the post, "To-day I took a California horse of the old style, – the run, the loping gait, – and visited the Presidio. The walls stand as they did, with some changes made to accommodate a small garrison of United States troops. It has a noble situation, and I saw from it a clipper ship of the very largest class, coming through the Gate, under her fore-and-aft sails. Thence I rode to the Fort, now nearly finished, on the southern shore of the Gate, and made an inspection of it." The visitor knew about ships. He had been to San Francisco before and had written a book about it. He called it *Two Years Before the Mast*, for he was Richard Henry Dana.⁷⁸

(..continued)

Doubleday, 1972), pp. 177-179, 213, and 248.

78. Lewis, *This Was California*, p. 155.